

Be certain that each photo has a “credit line.” Depending upon the arrangement you made with the photographer(s) this will either be his/her name or business name, or your organization’s name. Also, specify if the photo can only be used for promotional purposes but not in advertising.

**Helpful Hint:** *Send a representative sample of your color slides to California Tourism for wide distribution through their marketing efforts.*



### **Put It All Together in a Press Kit**

“Please send me a press kit” is one of the most common requests from travel writers and editors. And it’s a request that you should be able to comply with immediately.

A press kit (or you may call it a “media kit”) doesn’t have to cost you a fortune, in fact, keeping the cost relatively low will encourage wider distribution. There’s nothing worse than the feeling that you have spent so much money preparing your press kit that you hate to send it to anyone!

You’ll want to put information in the kit that will help “sell” the area to the writer as a potential story subject, as well as provide all the basic facts that will help them create the story. You’ll want all the facts and figures about your event or area, a good map showing its location, generic and specific press releases and a strong selection of photographs. Remember that the writer will use *selected* pieces of the information that you include, and never the whole thing. He or she is likely planning to use the press kit as a resource for shaping the story uniquely to their own publication.

A good media kit will have *at minimum* the following material:

- A well written, informative generic press release on your area or event. Write it as if it was going to run verbatim in a major publication (which in all likelihood won’t happen, but you never know!)
- Fact sheets. You can include several pages of these, which include well-researched facts, historical information, driving directions, and contact information. These can be about your area in general, specific attractions and events. Don’t forget to include resources available on the Internet, which reporters love because of its easy access.

- Photos...both generic and event-specific. Include black and white glossies that are at least 5"x7" in size, along with a sheet of color slides.
- Finally, add your brochures, visitors guide and any other printed material you think the writer will find helpful. This is where you can tailor the kit to the specific needs of a writer who has made a request for the information. Don't forget to include your business card, which should be mounted on the inside flap of the kit's cover.

### **Bringing Writers to You**

One technique for gaining publicity for your area is to invite travel writers to your area for a small group tour. Since the idea is to "familiarize" writers with your destination, you'll most often hear them called "fam tours" or "fam trips." Although often quite productive, you'll find mixed feelings in the destination marketing community about their effectiveness.

Some media relations pros feel that the most successful writers don't want to see anything in a group with other writers. Many major metropolitan newspapers won't send a writer to participate in a "fam" where writers are hosted (their costs paid) by a destination or hotel with a vested interest in the outcome of the story. The way to reach these writers is definitely "one-on-one."



But others feel that the press fam is still a viable way of getting publicity, especially in smaller publications that might not be able to afford to pay the full expenses of a writer on their own.

Should you decide that the press fam is a valuable tool in your media arsenal, you'll want to remember that a successful fam must include the following components:

- Thorough planning
- Proper execution
- Good follow-up

The way you set up the fam, execute it, and follow up after it is over will be clearly

reflected in the stories that appear as a result of the trip. Writers may feel a certain obligation to write a favorable piece, but that will not outweigh a bad experience. And without proper follow-up after the trip has ended, there might not be a story at all!

Decide early what you want the fam to feature and what the desired outcome will be. What do you want the writers to say about your destination or event? This is your chance to influence coverage of your area as a destination for visitors. Try to avoid a trip that is unfocused in its coverage of your destination. Writers are looking for feature ideas and suggesting a theme or two ahead of time is quite appropriate.

### **Who Should be Invited?**

Selecting *quality* participants can be among the most difficult issues surrounding a press trip. The writers you would most like to see on the trip can be the most difficult to get. Conversely, writers who make it clearly known that they would love to participate may simply be looking for a free mini-vacation.

The California Tourism office can be of great help. They can provide you with lists of travel media from within California, across the country or even international writers. You



will of course want to develop a list of writers for your own office...writers who write about specific subjects like hunting, fishing or RV camping or who have written about competing destinations. Watch the publications that you wish to be in for bylines and contact information such as e-mail addresses and phone numbers. Be a little suspicious of writers who contact you asking specifically about your next “press fam.” Ask to see samples (tear sheets) of articles they have written and check their memberships in serious travel writer organizations. Weigh the significance of the publication(s) they write for against the cost of their participation in the trip. Make sure those you invite are serious, published journalists and not just vacationers with notebooks and cameras!

### **Organizing the Trip**

When setting dates and planning your press fam, you may find yourself facing a dilemma. That is, you need to arrange as many complementary services from your local providers as possible in order to cost-effectively produce the trip. The problem obviously is that when your area is in its peak season, those services will be less readily available. In fact



**Although somewhat disappointed with the transportation arrangements, the travel writers were none-the-less eager to begin whale watching.**

hotels may well be sold out, transportation companies too busy, attractions already working at near-capacity, and so on. In other words, the time of the year when your destination is most desirable to visitors is the least likely time to be able to arrange a press familiarization trip. Your local providers won't feel like giving much if anything away that can be sold to paying customers and you certainly can't blame them!

So, bear in mind the availability of free lodging and transportation services when planning your press trip. You won't want to show insensitivity to your local entrepreneurs by asking for favors they just can't provide. Press fams should be scheduled in the shoulder seasons if possible...those times of year when the weather is still predictably cooperative and tourist industry inventory is readily available.

A press fam should be about three to five days long, depending on who participates and how much of your area you wish to present. Allow participants plenty of free time, as writers are by nature a curious bunch and will want to explore your region on their own. Make a list of "must-sees" in your area ahead of time, and make sure to schedule tours, visits or inspections of the most important places.

You'll have to house, transport and feed your tour participants for the length of their stay. An occasional "lunch on your own" here and there in the schedule might be appreciated, but other than that keep them together as a group at the beginning and end of every day. It's fine to take the group to a different area restaurant for every meal, but try to

arrange lodging in one hotel for the length of the trip. There's nothing more annoying for a fam trip participant than having to spend a disproportionate amount of time packing and unpacking. You can use another hotel next time.

You'll know before they arrive how many writers and writer/photographers you will be hosting, so don't forget to allow plenty of photo opportunities as well.

Travel writers are professionals, and you'll need to make sure that your itinerary is a professional one as well. The key to a successful press trip is planning.

**Helpful Hint:** *Don't overfeed the writers! Box lunches can be a welcome respite from heavy restaurant meals and there's nothing wrong with a continental breakfast. Nobody likes to feel "stuffed" or face a big meal when they're not hungry.*



### Following Up

A week or so after the trip contact the participants by letter or phone to see if you can provide any additional information. Do they need photos, facts and figures or additional interviews? Be as helpful as possible. And don't hesitate to ask them if they have a tentative publication date for their story. After all, you paid for their visit and the writer realizes that publicity is what you were looking for.

Ask the writers who participated to send you copies of the articles when they are published. Remember that you will have no control of what is actually said about your destination, but if you were thorough and helpful, presented your destination in it's most positive light and provided as much information as possible, chances are you'll be delighted with the result.

**Helpful Hint:** *Don't be disappointed if the hotel where your writers stayed or the restaurants that provided meals aren't mentioned specifically in the article. Make sure local businesses know ahead of time that their participation is to benefit the community as a whole, and that all will prosper with more visitors.*



### Crisis Public Relations (What to Say When All Hell Breaks Loose)

Of course, we hope this will never happen. But once in a while dams break, trains fall off the tracks or terrible crimes



occur. What you do or say as the official spokesperson for your region can often make the difference in public perception of an incident or accident, and its long-term effect on tourism to your region.

The principal rule of crisis PR is to tell the truth, and tell it first. If a crime or accident has occurred within your community or region, acknowledge it and express your sincere regret. If it is possible to soothe the experience of the victims through complementary meals or lodging, try to arrange to do so. Never deny the existence of the problem or appear unsympathetic. Victims never “asked for it” even if they had \$100 bills hanging out of their pockets!

When dealing with natural disasters, again never falsely minimize the problem. Address what is being done to correct the situation (if anything *can* be done), and present as many facts and figures as possible. If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t guess, but agree to get back to the questioner with the right answer. The more you know about your area ahead of a crisis, the better you will be able to respond when one occurs. Get to know the people in charge at the city and county level in the event of an emergency, and ask to be a participant in their response plans.

Remember that the public generally has a short memory for specific negative events and incidents, and a much longer one for the general image of an area. So after the crisis is over (and it *will* eventually end) begin immediately to disseminate positive press releases and story ideas. If appropriate, plan to invite the media back to show how your area has recovered from the problem and is moving forward.